

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

ScholarWorks @ UTRGV

History Faculty Publications and Presentations

College of Liberal Arts

4-2016

Leaders of the Mexican American Generation: Biographical Essays ed. by Anthony Quiroz (review)

Harriett Denise Joseph

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Harriett.Joseph@utrgv.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/hist_fac



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Joseph, Harriett Denise, "Leaders of the Mexican American Generation: Biographical Essays ed. by Anthony Quiroz (review)" (2016). *History Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 7.
https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/hist_fac/7

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts at ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.

purposes, including to reveal the experiences of the interviewees at and contributions to Baylor and nearby communities. As part of the interview process, these narrators all spoke about their experiences during World War II, even when the war was not the primary focus of the interview. That oral history archives can incidentally collect such fascinating stories from individuals is a testimony to the strengths of oral history and its versatility as a historical source.

Overall, if one is seeking a work with a deep narrative connection to Texas, you might not find what you are looking for within this work. However, if a reader is seeking interesting wartime accounts of individuals with ties to the state of Texas, this work will in no way disappoint. This work should also serve to inspire historians to reexamine oral history testimonies for less apparent connections that may prove to be compelling.

University of North Texas

TIFFANY SMITH

Leaders of the Mexican American Generation: Biographical Essays. Edited by Anthony Quiroz. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2015. Pp. 368. Photographs, notes, list of contributors, index.)

Biographies of thirteen major activists of the Mexican American generation, which is defined as “bounded by the years from 1920 to 1965” (xiv), are presented in this anthology that resulted from a symposium commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the American GI Forum. Editor Anthony Quiroz notes that the work is designed not only to provide biographical overviews of these men and women who “shaped the character and identity of this generation” (xiv) but also to place them in their historical context and recognize the significance of their contributions. Overall, the volume meets these objectives.

The leaders covered, who range from the well-known to the lesser-known, include Alice Dickerson Montemayor, Jovita González Mireles, Luisa Moreno, Dr. Héctor Pérez García, Vicente Ximenes, Ralph Estrada, and others. The chapter on the Félix Longoria controversy is more the biography of an event than a person. The contributors have done their research, are knowledgeable about their subjects, and in some cases interviewed them. Each author is invested in the person being profiled; however, the chapters are not hagiographies. Writing on Gus García, for example, Quiroz acknowledges García’s estrangement from his family, struggle with alcoholism, and tendency to depression. The inclusion of these frailties humanizes the activists and makes their stories more credible.

The biographical approach, as used here, generally makes for interesting, enlightening reading; however, there are some issues with an unevenness of writing style and differences in formatting of chapters. Also, there

is a degree of overlap and repetition, caused in part by the frequent interactions and interpersonal relationships among the activists, as well as their involvement in some of the same institutions. Many of the thirteen profiled individuals resided in Texas, and much attention is paid to the history of LULAC and the American GI Forum, both of which had their origins there. Therefore, considerable content relates to the history of the Lone Star State, with other areas of the Southwest covered to a lesser degree.

Editor Quiroz notes that the complex Mexican American generation has at times been derided “as middle-class people who pursued whiteness and who were willing to sell out their *Mexicanidad* to secure a richer place in society” (347). This revisionist work challenges those assumptions. The chapters collectively present a compelling argument that these thirteen activists, while embracing American citizenship and ideals, effectively used weapons such as “union organization, the ballot box, and the lawsuit” (346) in their fight for equality. Quiroz contends that their “legacy was a bicultural identity and being rooted in American society” (346), and he asserts that their generation helped to shape the civil rights movement. Given that not all scholars accept the existence of a Mexican American generation as defined in this volume, Quiroz’s conclusions will elicit some debate. Nevertheless, *Leaders of the Mexican American Generation* is a valuable historiographical contribution that encourages additional research into the subject.

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

HARRIETT DENISE JOSEPH

No Small Dreams: J. Erik Jonsson—Texas Visionary. By Darwin Payne. (Dallas: DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, 2014. Pp. 272. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.)

Biographies can be fickle. On the one hand, the author must allow the subject to remain the focal point of the work, but on the other, proper context and background must be provided to ensure the subject becomes more than a stark relief against a faded backdrop that does little to illuminate their actions. Southern Methodist University communications professor emeritus Darwin Payne attempts to balance these conflicting principles in *No Small Dreams*, his biography of Texas Instruments executive, philanthropist, and Dallas mayor J. Erik Jonsson, the child of Swedish immigrants. Jonsson’s life intersected with a number of formative events in North Texas during the twentieth century—the rise of the oil industry, the computer revolution, and the civil rights movement—and he played a key role in all of them.

Payne’s thesis is simple: Jonsson was a “visionary industrialist” who became the “greatest mayor in [Dallas] history” as he “guided the city